



The Declaration of the Institute of Javanologi LPPM  
Sebelas Maret University



**EXPLORING NOBLE VALUES OF  
LOCAL WISDOM AND  
PRIME *JAVANESE* CULTURE  
TO STRENGTHEN  
THE NATION IDENTITY**

**Surakarta, Indonesia  
March, 6-7, 2011**

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## INTERIOR SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE JAVANESE HOUSE

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The Javanese house is an artificial environment of the manifestation of cultural values that contains values of function, meaning and symbol. Physically, the house contains implicit meanings that accommodate domestic activities. The shape of the house becomes a mode of materializing human existence, as a cosmological symbol of manifesting self-orientation. The Javanese house becomes a symbol that is vertically measured transcendent-metaphysic and horizontally immanent. A house, in the view of the Javanese people, is the materialization of comprehending the macrocosm/universe and the natural environment or the natural condition surrounding human life, as well as the microcosm/human and his socio-cultural values.

**Keyword: Javanese house, Space, Meaning**

### **Introduction**

Space basically is a reality that is invisible but can be sensed and felt. Man can see, hear, think and taste in his human way. His physical and biological functions are in harmony with the physical universe, including every space material world (Mangunwijaya, 1992:1). Every reality faced by man passes through the space and time dimension. A real object cannot be understood without placing it in the frame of space and time. Space is a form of external experience, whereas time is an internal experience (Cassirer, 1987:74), that covers the past, the present (vision moment) and the future (anticipation). Man undergoes a long process to achieve an understanding of truth in his life. His creative reasoning is capable of drawing meaning from space and time logically, psychologically and reflectively. The original natures of space and time in a human experience can be found by analyzing cultural forms, including works of architecture and interior.

Space is a manifestation of cultural values. Every physical aspect, form, meaning and content expressed by space instills a perception in man, and even becomes a preserved symbol because it provides comfort, security and enjoyable sensations. Space is an embodiment of various conceptual matters in the human mind. The idea of space will always develop with relative concepts of space and time. These concepts develop along with the human knowledge that changes from a simpler level to a more complex level. The knowledge helps to direct man to understanding values, conceptions and views and guides his actions in his living environment. Knowledge is needed in a man's effort to seek harmonious experience to achieve a certain psychological state, such as peace, tranquility and natural balance.

Although a building is an unliving object it does not mean it is soulless. A house is built as a place for man. Thus, it is a place that will always be passed by

human breath, nature and dreams (Mangunwijaya, 1992). The main function of a house is as a living space to accommodate domestic activities that seeks benefits, advantages, pleasure, and security. Architectural works are valued because they provide satisfactions in social and personal needs, which are utilized in various beneficial and functional ways for human life (Feldman, 1967). Studying Javanese house means to study things that are invisible, that gives breath, to place your soul in it and to be a part of the concrete as well as the symbolic reality (Laurens, 2004:26). The symbolic function of the whole form of the house is to revive material signs and to make them speak out their message. As quoted by Epiktetos, "What disturbs and makes us anxious is not the objects but the opinions and notions surrounding those objects", what disturbs are the imaginary emotions, longings, anxiety, illusions and delusions, fantasies and dreams (Cassirer, 1987).

### **The Meaning of Space in the Javanese House**

The Javanese society altogether actualize their construction of understanding through social institutions and public symbols, such as the calendar systems, celebration events, life rituals, creation of settlements and territorial administrations. The Javanese tradition possess some differences, when time is constructed as a singular linear progress, that are accumulated along the flow of its development and that travels forward constantly. The Javanese system of thought prioritize spatial order in organizing phenomena rather than temporal order (Santosa, 2000). Space and time are fundamental matters in Javanese cosmology and are essential in their relation with matters of nature that has rules or principles which are later referred to as natural law. The principle of causality or causal rules become one of the basic matters in the field of the *jagad gedhe* (macrocosm, universe) and *jagad cilik* cosmology (microcosm, humankind) (Siswanto, 2005).

Human life in the Javanese cultural environment is essentially based on four areas or scopes of conviction, constituting of belief, social ties, personal expression (personality) and problems or meaning. These four aspects would influence man's pattern of thought, actions and works. In his works are also the presence of an artificial environment, a house or an architectural work as a part of his cultural life and cultural expression to convey particular messages that could draw cultural interpretations from one period or one nation (Ronald, 2005). In the view of the mythological beliefs of the society, architectural forms are present as mythic means, as cosmological symbols of the manifestation of the basic form of self orientation, supporting the presence of man himself. Self-orientation is a natural instinct for preventing man from wandering without certainty (Mangunwijaya, 1992). A work of architecture forms a reflection of human life attitudes that has undergone many changes, depending on the development of man's thought about the universe.

In the spatial arrangement of Javanese houses, man do not only associate with physical or perceptual objects, because he only studies the spatial relationship to present itself with adequate symbols. The representation of space and spatial relationships are not only to deal with an object in the right way but also for practical use. A person has a comprehensive conception of an object in a room and observe it from several points of view so that other objects in the room can be seen, and place it in the overall system. Man's experience has shown that there will always be a threat in every order system, a frame of signs that are not ambiguous, and thus will be a destination in itself to strictly be enforced and maintained so as not to deviate.

The Javanese house or also known as *dalem* forms an artificial environment. The environment in physical understanding, or the natural environment, which in other texts is mentioned a cosmos (universe) or a natural state surrounding human life. Another direction is the environment through the non-physical understanding, the social environment, in which some also refer as cosmos. The world of human life then is referred to as macrocosm and microcosm. Apart from that, the overall system of the Javanese house forms a reflective shadow of the true natural environment that truly depends on various natural phenomena that are present at their time. Space, according to the Javanese life view forms the embodiment of the comprehension of macrocosm or the universe and the natural environment or the natural condition surrounding human life, as well as the microcosm or mankind and his social and cultural values. The comprehension of the presence of a world centre is a fundamental comprehension of the Javanese people. Man cannot live in an empty universe or a homogeny space. Man needs orientation to bring him towards inner peace and inner direction. Orientation originates from the word orient or east, which means finding the eastern horizon (the west as its opposition). This understanding originates from daily experiences such as sunrise and sunset. So strong is the influence of the orientation of the sun that many nations believe the sun is the source of life. The orientation of the four directions, east west and north south creates an imaginary point of axes, a centre where diagonal lines meet. This centre point is termed as *pusering jagat*, the central pillar of firmament. According to ancient folk tales, if the island of Java was not nailed in the middle it would float in the vast ocean, and the nail point is at Mount Tidar in Magelang, as King Surakarta titled at Paku Buwana (Earth nail) (Mangunwijaya, 1992).

The orientation of the four directions and one centre has become the compass in building Javanese houses, with the orientation of the sacred north south axis and with *dalem* as the centre point. The concentration of space and figural representation at the center shows that supremacy is achieved by concentrating on two sides of dual characteristics, the outside and inside, the domain of state and family, the male and female, with The Ruler placing himself as the mediator between the two areas.

## **Interior Spatial Arrangement of The Javanese House**

### **1. Building form and Space Organization**

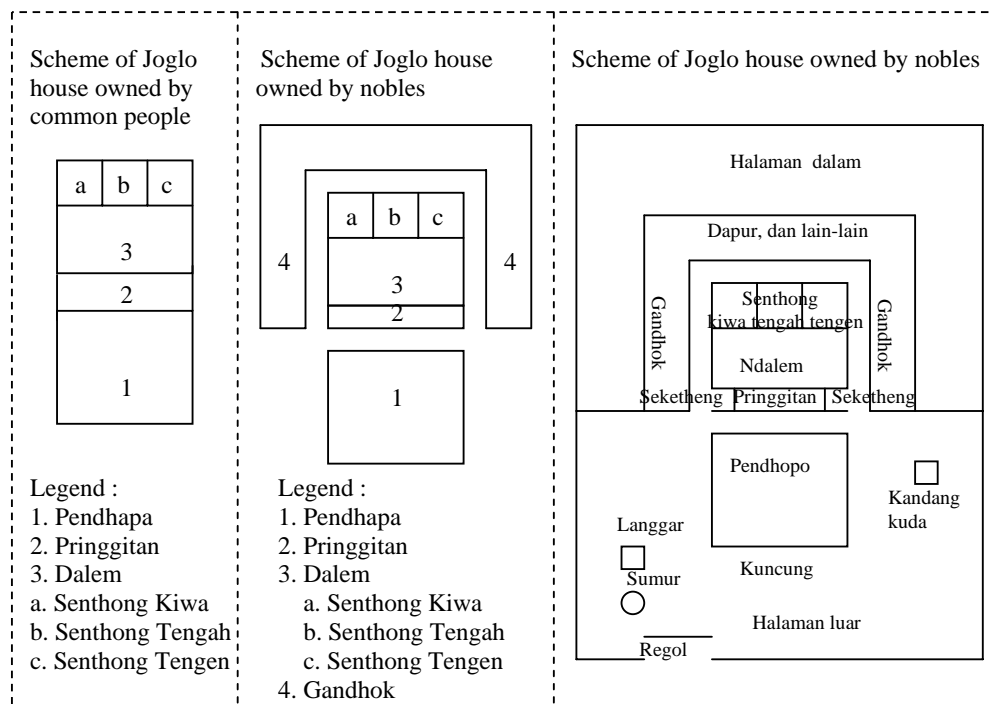
The shape of a Javanese house is very diverse and develops in accordance with the process of the formation of a culture, i.e. from a simple level to a level that is more complex. In typology, the Javanese house is generally square or rectangular in form. This form indicates clarity, rationality, regularity, visual clarity, stability and leads to a monotonous atmosphere such that it needs variations in size, color placement, and others. This form supports the ease of measurement.

Houses with round or oval typology have never been references in planning a traditional Javanese house. The forms of Javanese houses are distinguished by the shape of its roof such as *joglo*, *limasan*, *kampung*, *masjid* and *tajug* or *tajub*, as well as the *panggung-pe* shaped house. From some forms of the houses, there is a general term used to describe a type of home. If a house's length (longitudinal size) is more than ordinary size and the pole is longer than normal size, such that the *dedeg* (standing sate) is higher than the usual with a rather vertical roof, then the house would be called the young house. If the beams used to make the structural frame of the house are thicker than the normal size, then the house would be called *lanangan*

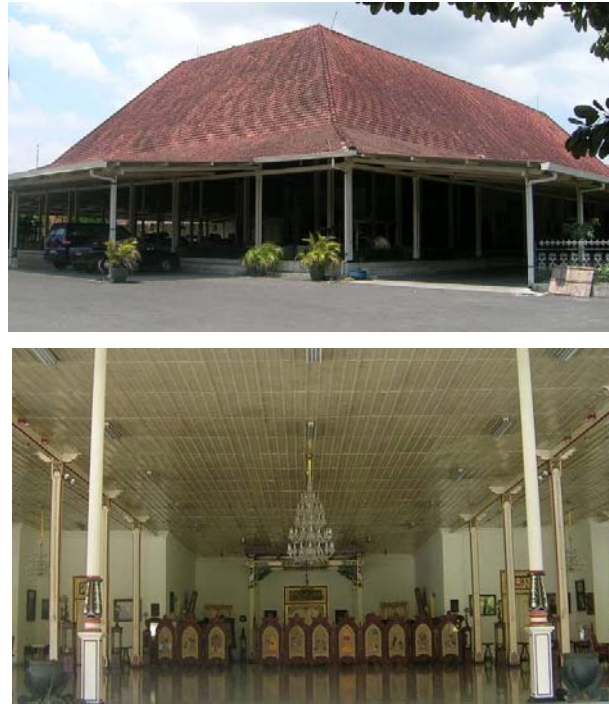
(lanang means man). If the length of a house is shorter than the usual size, its pole abit lower than the normal height, such that the *dedeg* seems low as well as the roof, the house would be called *sepuh* house (old). If the beams used as the structural frame of the house are thinner or smaller than normal size, then house would be called the female house or *pedaring kebak*. *Pedaringan* means a container of rice, while *kebak* means ful (Hamzuri, 14).

The spatial arrangement of the *joglo* house is clearer than that of the *limasan* and the *kampung* house. The spatial arrangement of a *joglo* house owned by a common class is divided into three parts, namely: *senhong tengen*, *senhong tengah* and *senhong kiwa*. For the class of nobles, the *senhong tengah* contains a variety of equipment items that have a universal meaning of the sacredness, symbolizing fertility and happiness in the household. The personification is Dewi Sri. *Pasren* equipments owned by nobles among others are *genuk*, *kendhi*, *juplak*, *lampu robhyong*, *paidon*, *loro blony* and eagle models. Sometimes *senhong tengah* is used to for silencing creation and praying to God.

The composition of the Javanese house consists of a pair of rooms, namely the front / outside and back / inside. These room actualize the main idea in the domestic setting, namely as a place to live and to build relationships (Santosa, 2000). Some houses have *pendhapa*, while some use a divider between the *pendhapa* and the *pringgitan*. The divider is in the form of a small alley called *longkangan*. The *pendhapa* owned by nobles mostly serves as a place for performances of traditional arts such as dances.



**Figure 1.** Scheme of Joglo house complex owned by common people and nobles (Source : Dakung, 1981/1982 : 56, 60).



**Figure 2.** Architectural and Interior view of *Pendhapa Dalem* of Pakualaman Yogyakarta (Photo: Writer's documentation)

## 2. Room Structural Elements

The interior space of a building is formed by structural elements of the architecture. Columns, walls, floors, ceilings, doors and windows give shape to the building, separating it from the outside, and form a pattern arrangement of interior spaces. In the context of Javanese house construction, residents will meet with other people in an open space in front. The boundaries of the open space that blocks visual and physical interaction is minimized in order to allow intensive relations with the outside world. The *pendhapa* is bounded only by elevated floor terraces, lines of columns and its *teritis* shade. The floors used, as physical elements of the interior space, are usually of the same material in the *pendhapa*, *dalem* and the other areas. Whereas the ceiling shading the interior space and providing physical and psychological protection usually use the intercropping roof arrangement but sometimes could also be in the form of a flat plane covering the roof.



**Figure 3.** Intercropping ceiling in *Pendhapa Dalem* Mangkunegaran Surakarta (Photo: Writer's documentation)





**Figure 4.** The Interior of Pendhapa Dalem Mangkunegaran Surakarta  
(Photo: Writer's documentation)

High columns with an intercrossing crown in the middle of the *pendhapa* of the Javanese house are vertical figures that defines center of the room. The binding centre is expressed by the building and actions its occupants. The actions that define this center may also mean to express the authority of the owner as the leading force in the realm of his control. Whereas the protected realm or the back area of the house, is part of the nature of the private space that maximizes the physical boundaries of the room. To create the character of space as a part that is protected is to elevate, thicken and arrange multiple layers of binding walls, as well as to reduce openings or the penetration of sunlight. Functionally, this means restricting access. The nature of this area is more towards protective rather than just private (Santosa: 2000).

### **Space Filling Elements**

The interior of Javanese house becomes the center, and has complete elements and arrangement just like a complete house without having to function as the whole, provides assurance to inhabitants that if they lose other parts of another house, they still have a house complete with a *senthong* and bed, or a room and its contents. Assorted furniture with teak wood and various ornaments indicate that inhabitants of higher status than the others.

The back area of the Javanese house is used to accommodate household activity. This is the areas that has most "life" can be in the form of *amben* and *gandhok* that is multifunctional. This area encloses the shrine, which is divided into two parts, namely the east and west that are generally associated with gender separator. This gender separator is very flexible. An area that can be for the male at one occasion and the female on another occasion. The simpler a house, the more supple such sharing and exchange. This is the same in the arrangement of furniture, the way they are organized will influence how space is being used and understood. Various furnishings that create a certain room atmosphere provide a description of the crowded world.



**Figure 5.** Replication of Krobongan in senthong tengah and its *pasren* equipments in Yogyakarta (Photo: Author's Documentation)



**Figure 6.** *Dalem* center serves as a living room and showroom for valuable objects in *dalem* GBPH. Joyokusumo (Photo: Author Documentation)

#### 4. Decoration Elements

Decorations in traditional Javanese house building are basically of two kinds, constructional and non-constructional. A Constructional decoration is a decoration that cannot be separated from the building, while non-constructional decoration is a decoration that can be removed from the building and does not affect anything on the construction of the building. The purpose of applying decoration is to acquire peace, pleasure and coolness, as well as instilling beauty to the building. The existence of

decoration is a form of natural representation of heaven to earth. Decorations that represents heaven to the Javanese people are ornaments found in Hindu temples. In this temple we can find ornaments of *flora* or fauna *found* that have been distilled. Following the arrival of Islamic art and culture, represented by the mosque buildings, ornaments of calligraphy are widely used. Ornaments of *flora* that are well-known in Yogyakarta, among others, are *lung-lungan*, *saton*, *wajikan*, *nanasan*, *tlacapan*, *kebenan*, *Patran*, *padma*, and so forth. *Fauna* decorations, among others are *kemamang*, rooster, dragon, and *peksi garuda*. Decorations referring to religious aspects and beliefs among others are *mirong* and calligraphy. Natural ornaments include mountains, *makutha*, *Praba*, *kepetan*, and so forth. Each ornament has a shape, color and symbolic meaning. They are all usually stylized from their original forms. (Dakung, 1981/1982).



**Figure 7.** Decorative Ornaments on the gates of Bangsal Manis Keraton Yogyakarta, in the form of kemamang flanked by two dragon snakes (Photo: Author Documentation).

Sugiyarto Dakung explained that the *lung-lungan* motif consists of stems, leaves, flowers and fruit. This motif is not given any colour in the Javanese house. But there are times when it is coloured, as in the house of nobles. The basic colour is dark red or red brown, the *lung-lungan* is coloured gold, stems or leaves are colored green in *sunggingan* way, where as the flowers and fruit are colored red. In Javanese tradition, red color symbolizes courage or the flow of lustful anger while golden-yellow symbolizes grandeur and majesty (Brontodiningrat, 1978). This motif symbolizes fertility and prosperity and is usually placed on the beam house frame structure, the *tebeng* of windows and doors, vents, walls, and others.

## Conclusion

Cultural artifacts in the form of royal houses are aesthetic expressions of cultural people that contain religious, philosophical and cultural values. This expression is the result of the human attempt to build a relationship with God and the universe, and with each other. Visual manifestation can be observed through (1) orientation, determining the direction of view, considering the rotation of the sun. The pattern, four directions and one center., becomes a very important principle, with north-south the orientation which is sacred, (2) The typology of Java is generally squared in its layout, consisting of a pair of rooms, the front /outside and back / inside, with the center as a place for Dewi Sri . (3) The space is physically formed by the floors, walls and ceiling. This physically boundary provides territorial

separation and separates the outside space from the inside. Doors and windows are means of connecting two rooms, facilities for maintaining the balance of sound, air and light that visually and physically influences the atmosphere and harmony of space, (4) High columns with intercropping ceilings gives a sense of verticality that defines the center of the room, (5) The furniture do not only contain functional means but also contain symbolic aesthetic values. Their flexibility makes them easy to be moved and contribute to the expression of the space, (6) The ornamental decorations beauty the room, possess symbolic meanings and help to create the impression of a propane or sacred space.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Javanese house contains values of function, meaning and symbol. Physically, the house serves to accommodate domestic activities. The architectural forms, spatial arrangement, organization of space and its contents is a human effort to *memayu hayuning Buwana* (beautify the world) by radiating goodness, truth and beauty. The Javanese house is arranged hierarchically to become a place for people to interact with the macrocosm/universe and the natural environment or natural conditions surrounding human life, as well as the microcosm/ human and its socio-cultural values.

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